

# A Therapist's Needs

A boundary violation is the rupture of the sacred agreement a psychotherapist makes with a client. "I will put my client's needs above my own."

Maybe it seems that for fifty minutes you have no personal needs beyond insuring that the client and their insurance pay you. We're seduced into believing we have few needs, both because we set them aside while we work and our professional status buoys us above our needs. It's enticing to feel invulnerable in this way.

Our work is meaningful and sometimes makes a palpable difference in our client's life. We like being respected and listened to, or we like the intimate contact we have hour after hour. Ah, this feels so good, especially on those mornings when our teenage kid just shrugged us off or after our last client left saying they would email us to make another appointment and we doubted we would ever see them again. We get significant needs met in our work.

Other personal needs lay in wait, sometimes slipping into the session. As usual, Greta greets you warmly, inquiring, "How are you?" You share more than you intended. "Got into a fender bender this morning." This honest response might put her at ease since she picked up that something was awry. Your acknowledgement of a shared existential vulnerability might deepen the therapeutic bond and open the door for her vulnerabilities. Then again, she might get drawn into taking care of you, shy away from "bothering" you, not mention the awful fight with her sweetie. Hard to know for sure. Though when we stay attuned and talk about what got stirred up in the client, this kind of boundary crossing probably doesn't cause harm.

Continuing with this example you might evade a response, mask how shaken you feel by the accident. Instead you become too certain, ready to give ill-timed advice and sit in judgement when the homework you gave last week was forgotten. Somehow it seems this enables you to face the next client with surer footing. This could cause harm.

*Because we set aside our needs while we work, we must listen to and attend to them more diligently at other times. Most of our personal needs are best met outside the therapy room.*

Meditation provides the context to listen and attend deeply to your inner world, hopefully with the kindness you provide to your clients. Meditation can sensitize you to more subtle needs and how you intend to meet them. You will be less likely to pull your clients into listening to you. These are only a few ways that meditation can help the meditating therapist.

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